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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 KABUL 07350 01 OF 02 071048Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ADS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-06
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 SY-05 USSS-00 AID-05 A-02 OPR-02
SR-04 MCT-02 HA-05 OCS-06 CA-01 ACDA-12 OC-06
CCO-00 TRSE-00 EB-08 /146 W
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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5900
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
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AMEMBASSY JDDA
AMCONSUL KARACHI
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 7350

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TAGS: PINS, ASEC, AF, UR
SUBJ: (LOU) CURRENT STATUS OF THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

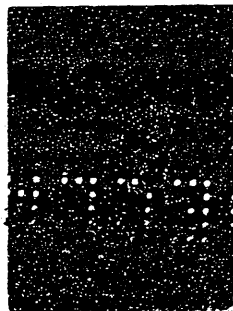
REF: KABUL 6697
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 KABUL 07350 01 OF 02 071048Z

1. (LOU) INTRODUCTORY NOTE: IN THE JUDGMENT OF THIS

CONFIDENTIAL

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EMBASSY THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE USED TO BRIEF MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS, SELECTED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES (NO ATTRIBUTION SHOULD BE MADE TO USG SOURCES, HOWEVER), AND OFFICIALS OF FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS. THE OVERALL CLASSIFICATION OF THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN KEPT AT CONFIDENTIAL SHOULD SOME WASHINGTON AGENCY PREFER THAT CERTAIN MATERIAL BE WITHHELD AT THIS TIME. END OF INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

2. (C) SUMMARY: HAFIZULLAH AMIN FACES THE SAME DECAYING SECURITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AS DID HIS DEPOSED PREDECESSOR, NOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI. AS A RESULT OF HIS COUP AGAINST THE REMAINING MILITARY MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, AMIN ALSO FACES INCREASED DOUBTS ABOUT THE CONTINUING LOYALTY OF THE AFGHAN ARMED FORCES. OVER THE SHORT RUN, HOWEVER, AMIN -- WITH THE INDISPENSABLE SUPPORT OF HIS SOVIET MENTORS -- STILL SEEMS CAPABLE OF CONTAINING THE INSURRECTION IN THE AREAS OF GREATEST STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE TO THE REGIME. END OF SUMMARY.

3. (LOU) FIRED MILITARY LEADERS STILL AT LARGE: DURING THE MONTH SINCE OUR LAST SUMMARY (REFTEL), DRAMATICALLY VIOLENT POLITICAL EVENTS HAVE OCCURRED AT KABUL. ON SEPTEMBER 14, HAFIZULLAH AMIN FIRED THE LAST REMAINING MILITARY OFFICERS FROM THE CABINET AND SEIZED THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP FROM NOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI. UNFORTUNATELY FOR AMIN, HOWEVER, THE FIRED MINISTERS, MOHAMMAD ASLAM WATANJAR, SHER JAN MAZDOGARYAR, AND SAYED MOHAMMAD GULABZOI, SKIPPED OUT OF THE VIOLENT CONFRONTATION ATTENDING AMIN'S COUP, AND ARE PROBABLY STILL AT LARGE SOMEWHERE IN AFGHANISTAN. LOCAL OBSERVERS ASSUME THAT THEY MAY BE TRYING TO ESTABLISH LIAISON WITH DISAFFECTED MILITARY UNITS. THERE
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 03 KABUL 07350 01 OF 02 071048Z

IS NO HARD EVIDENCE YET, HOWEVER, CONCERNING THEIR AFEREABOUTS OR ACTIVITIES.

4. (LOU) A PEACEFUL FACADE AT KABUL: KEY MILITARY FORCES IN THE KABUL REGION HAVE NOT YET SHOWN ANY INCLINATION TO CHALLENGE AMIN'S FAIT ACCOMPLI. THE AIR FORCE ALSO DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A THREAT TO HIM AT THIS TIME. THE LEVEL OF TENSION THAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED AMIN'S COUP HAS BEEN REDUCED MARKEDLY, AND THE CITY HAS RETURNED TO WHAT PASSES HERE FOR "NORMALCY" (E.G., THE NIGHTLY CURFEW OF THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, ARMORED VEHICLES GUARDING CERTAIN KEY IN-

CONFIDENTIAL

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STALLATIONS, AND LARGE NUMBERS OF TROOPS AND POLICE). THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE IS DECIDEDLY RELAXED, BUT THERE IS ALSO AN AIR OF WATCHFULNESS. ALTHOUGH MANY KABULIS HAD THOUGHT - AND HOPED -- THAT AMIN'S POLITICAL HEAD WOULD SOON FOLLOW TARAKI'S. THE RUTHLESS DICTATOR APPEARS MORE SELF-CONFIDENT AND WELL-ENTRENCHED AS EACH WEEK PASSES BY. HE CONTINUES TO PROMOTE "RULE OF LAW" THEMES AND BENIGN PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO TRANSFORM HIS BRUTAL IMAGE OF THE PAST INTO THAT OF A DEMOCRATIC "GOOD GUY." A STRANGER WHO HAD NOT SEEN THE FIRST REELS OF THE MOVIE COULD BE FOOLED -- BUT THE AFGHANS ARE NOT.

5. (LOU) THE ARMY STILL CONSIDERS ITS REACTION TO THE AMIN COUP: IT IS IN THE AREA BEYOND METROPOLITAN KABUL THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE AMIN REGIME IS BEING SORELY TESTED. MANY MILITARY OFFICERS ARE STILL DIGESTING THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT HAPPENDED TO THEIR COMRADES IN THE CABINET -- AND WHAT IT PORTENDS FOR THEIR OWN FUTURES. SOME UNITS ARE SHOWING SOME RELUCTANCE TO BE VERY ACTIVE AGAINST REBEL FORCES WHILE THE SITUATION REMAINS SO UNCLEAR. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN A FEW INSTANCES OF DEFECTIONS BY SOME UNITS -- AND, IN AT LEAST ONE CASE, SERIOUS FIGHTING BETWEEN TWO LARGE AFGHAN MILITARY FORCES.

6. (LOU) SERIOUS TROUBLE IN THE EAST: IN THE MEANTIME, THE
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04

KABUL 07350 01 OF 02 071048Z

REBELS HAVE NOT BEEN LETTING AMIN CATCH HIS BREATH. MUCH OF THE PANJSHIR VALLEY HAS BEEN REOCCUPIED BY REBEL FORCES. ALTHOUGH REBEL PRESSURE ON THE REMAINING KHALQI OUTPOSTS IN KONAR PROVINCE HAS BEEN RELIEVED SOMEWHAT, THAT IS PROBABLY BECAUSE SOME OF THE REBEL FORCES HAVE BEEN MOVING OVER INTO NEIGHBORING LAGHMAN AND NANGARHAR PROVINCES FOR RAIDS. IT IS IN PAKTIA PROVINCE AND NEIGHBORING AREAS THAT THE KHALQI FORCES ARE UNDER VERY SERIOUS ATTACK AT MANY LOCATIONS. WHEN GOVERNMENT TROOPS AND THEIR ARMOR DO OCCASIONALLY VENTURE FORTH OUT OF THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS TO SHOW THE FLAG, THE REBELS REPOSSESS THE REAL ESTATE AFTER THEY HAVE PASSED, LIKE THE WATERS OF THE RED SEA CLOSING IN BEHIND MOSES AND HIS FOLLOWERS.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 KABUL 07350 02 OF 02 070823Z
ACTION NEA 11

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AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 7350

7. (LOU) SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS IN TRAVEL IN THE SOUTH: THE
IMPORTANT ROAD BETWEEN KABUL AND KANDAHAR IS RARELY PASSABLE
ANYMORE. REPEATED REBEL ATTACKS IN KEY REGIONS ALONG THE
ROUTE, SUCH AS MAIDAN (A SOUTHER SUBURB OF KABUL), BHAZNI,
AND KALAT-I-GHILZAI, RENDER TRAVEL EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. THESE
BATTLES INVOLVE THE USE OF ARMOR, ARTILLERY, AND AIR POWER
AND MANY PRIVATE VEHICLES WHICH HAVE BLUNDERED INTO THESE
ENGAGEMENTS HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO INSTANT SIEVES. BANDS
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 02 KABUL 07350 02 OF 02 070823Z

OF REBELS, BANDITS, AND MILITARY DESERTERS RAID EVEN THE LARGEST
ROAD CONVOYS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH ARMORED VEHICLE ESCORTS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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ALTHOUGH THE CITY OF KANDAHAR ITSELF IS USUALLY RELATIVELY QUIET -- EXCEPT FOR OCCASIONAL POLITICAL MURDERS, THE SURROUNDING REGION SEETHES WITH UNREST RIGHT DOWN TO THE SPIN BOLDAX REGION. ONLY HELMAND PROVINCE REMAINS RELATIVELY PEACEFUL IN THE SOUTH.

8. (LOU) THE WIL0 WEST: THE MOST NOTEWORTHY GOVERNMENT WEAKNESS IN THE WEST IS ITS INABILITY TO MOVE TRAFFIC SAFELY ON THE KANDAHAR TO HERAT HIGHWAY. REBEL AND BANDIT ACTION THERE IS SO HEAVY AT CERTAIN POINTS, SUCH AS THE REGION 40 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF HERAT, THAT THE CHANCES ARE USUALLY LOW THAT A CONVOY WILL MAKE IT THROUGH SAFELY. ALL ROAD TRAFFIC MOVES IN CONVOYS. TROOPS ARE ASSIGNED TO CERTAIN VEHICLES, AND ARMORED VEHICLES PROVIDE THE ESCORT COVER. THE "DEFENDERS" THEMSELVES CAN BE DANGEROUS AT TIMES. ACCORDING TO A RECENT REPORT FROM ANOTHER EMBASSY HERE, A BESEIGED CONVOY NEAR SHINDAND AIR BASE RADIOED THAT INSTALLATION FOR HELP. THE AFGHAN AIR FORCE RESPONDED BY BOMBING THE CONVOY ITSELF. CASUALTIES WERE REPORTEDLY HEAVY.

9. (LOU) AS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE WESTERN PROVINCES, FROM NIMROZ NORTH TO BADGHIS, THE GOVERNMENT ONLY HOLDS THE CITIES. THEIR CONTROL OF HERAT, FOR EXAMPLE, DOES NOT EXTEND MORE THAN A FEW KILOMETERS BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS.

10. (LOU) THE NORTH REMAINS RELATIVELY QUIET: ASIDE FROM MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST REBEL FORCES OPERATING OUT OF THE NORTHERN SKIRTS OF THE HINDU KUSH MOUNTAINS, THE PLAINS OF AFGHAN TURKISTAN ARE RELATIVELY STABLE AT THIS TIME. THE IMPORTANT SALANG PASS ROAD FROM THAT REGION TO KABUL HAS BEEN USUALLY OPEN, WITH ONLY OCCASIONAL CHALLENGES FROM HIT-AND-RUN REBEL STRIKES. OVER THIS ROUTE, INCIDENTALLY,
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 KABUL 07350 02 OF 02 070823Z

PASSES THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF THE SOVIET RE-SUPPLY SUPPORT TO THE KHALQI REGIME. WHEN THE SALANG ROAD IS CLOSED, AS IT IS FROM TIME TO TIME, THE SOVIETS HAVE TO RELY MORE UPON AIR SHIPMENTS TO BAGRAM AIR BASE, KABUL, AND KANDAHAR.

11. (LOU) IN THE FAR NORTHEAST PROVINCE OF BADAKHSHAN, WHICH TOUCHES CHINA, THE KHALQIS REMAIN UNABLE TO DO MORE THAN CONTAIN GEOGRAPHICALLY ONE OF THE OLDEST AREAS OF INSURRECTION IN THE COUNTRY -- MUCH OF WHICH IS, INCIDENTALLY, A SPILLOVER FROM THE NURISTANI OPERATIONS IN NEIGHBORING KONAR PROVINCE. MINISTER OF WATER AND POWER HASHEMI HAS BEEN IN BADAKHSHAN FOR

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OVER TWO MONTHS, PERSONALLY DIRECTING THE KHALOJ FORCES (THE GOVERNMENT MEDIA REPORTS ONLY THAT HE IS MAKING SPEECHES AND DEDICATING NEW PUBLIC WORKS).

12. (LOU) A NEW STATE IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN? FOR MONTHS THE KABUL REGIME HAS HELD ONLY THE CAPITALS OF THE CENTRAL PROVINCES -- AND INTERMITTENTLY AT THAT. CHAKHCHURAN, CAPITAL OF GHOR, SLIPS UNDER REBEL CONTROL BRIEFLY FROM TIME-TO-TIME. BAMBIAN IS FREQUENTLY UNDER GREAT REBEL PRESSURE, ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT, WHEN NO SENSIBLE KHALOJ WOULD BE OUT ON THE STREETS. WE CONTINUE TO HEAR REPORTS, PARTICULARLY FROM HAZARA EXILE LEADERS AT PESHAWAR, THAT A REBEL GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED IN THE CENTRAL REGION. IT IS REPORTEDLY LEVYING TAXES AND JUDGING LEGAL CASES. ALTHOUGH WE LACK RELIABLE CONFIRMATION OF THESE REPORTS AT THIS TIME, IT IS PLAUSIBLE THAT SOME TYPE OF RUDIMENTARY ORDER MIGHT HAVE TO EVOLVE IN REGIONS SO LONG OUT OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL.

13. (LOU) THE OUTLOOK: AS THE AUTUMN NIGHTS GROW COOLER IN THE HIGHLAND WASTES OF AFGHANISTAN, OBSERVERS WONDER HOW THE ONSET OF WINTER WILL FAVOR OR HINDER THE REBELS AND THE REGIME. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS HERE IS THAT BOTH SIDES WILL BE AFFECTED IN ROUGHLY EQUAL MEASURE. WHILE THE REBELS MAY HAVE DESCENDED TO MORE EXPOSED LOWLAND POSITIONS FOR FOOD, FUEL, AND SHELTER, GOVERNMENT FORCES WILL FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO OPERATE
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 KABUL 07350 02 OF 02 070823Z

THEIR EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLES IN OFTEN MUDDY ROADS AND FREEZING WEATHER. NOT BEING AS TIED TO LOGISTICAL LIMITATIONS AS THE REGULAR FORCES, THE REBELS WILL CONTINUE TO ENJOY THE ADVANTAGE OF HIGHER MOBILITY -- AND THE CHOICE OF BATTLE SITES.

14. (LOU) IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, OUTSIDE FACTORS WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY IMPORTANT ROLES. WILL THE REBELS INSIDE AFGHANISTAN EVENTUALLY GET MEANINGFUL OUTSIDE SUPPORT (E.G., ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONS)? (THE REMITTANCE MEN OF THE REBEL ORGANIZATIONS HEADQUARTERED AT PESHAWAR ARE NOT YET VERY RELEVANT TO THE WIDE VARIETY OF REBEL FIGHTING BANDS WHO DO NOT OPERATE ALONG THE DURAND LINE FRONTIER; WE SEE NO EVIDENCE OF THEIR FORWARDING MONEY TO NURISTANIS OR HAZARAS.) WILL THE RUSSIANS BE ABLE TO ENSURE THE CONTINUE LOYALTY OF KEY AFGHAN MILITARY UNITS -- AND INCREASE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS? AMIN NOW APPEARS TO DEPEND TOTALLY UPON THE SOVIETS FOR SUPPORT. IT IS NOT YET CERTAIN HOW MUCH MOSCOW IS WILLING TO INVEST IN THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

ASSISTANCE EFFORT. UNLESS THERE IS A MAJOR COLLAPSE IN THE
LOYALTY AND DISCIPLINE OF THE AFGHAN ARMED FORCES, IT WOULD
APPEAR THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT YET HAVE TO MAKE THE TOUGH
DECISION ON WHETHER TO COMMIT THEIR OWN COMBAT FORCES TO RESTORE
ORDER. AMSTUTZ

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